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94 x 127cm
Mixed media

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Artnotes

*So geographers, in Afric-maps,
With savage-pictures fill their gaps;
And o'er unhabitable downs
Place elephants for want of towns*
[Jonathan Swift, *On Poetry*, 1733]

The geographers of whom Jonathan Swift wrote, nearly three hundred years ago, are not the only ones to have a blind spot when it comes to Africa.

If there's one thing Africa doesn't have, it's a 'want of towns'. The world has heard of Cairo, Lagos, Cape Town, Timbuktu. But hearing of them is not enough, as long as the elephants make more noise: what does the world *know* of them?

London's Tate Modern offered a window onto some of the world's cities earlier this year. *Century City: Art and Culture in the Modern Metropolis* was designed to explore 'the relationship between cultural creativity and the metropolis, by focusing on nine cities from around the world at specific moments over the last hundred years'.

The moments were in fact less specific than they were epochal, and most of the venues and eras chose themselves: London (1990-2001); Paris (1905-15); Vienna (1908-18); even, though slightly less convincingly, Mumbai in the 1990s. The others were Moscow (1916-30), New York (1969-74), Rio de Janeiro (1955-69) and Tokyo (1969-73).

Oh, and Lagos. 1955-70.

Lagos? 'A crucible for innovation'? 'A distinct artistic culture ... emblematic of wider global tendencies'? 'A creative flashpoint'? (Thus the criteria for inclusion.)

The South Bank beckoned. The promise of enlightenment was tantalising.

But enlightenment came there none. It was all a big mistake. They didn't really mean Lagos, after all. They meant Nigeria. In fact, what they probably intended, but could never have admitted, was to represent the whole of Africa.

Imagine the outcry if such an exhibition had been mounted without any reference at all to the continental cradle of civilisation; the home of the emblematic Mandela; the fount of global multiculturalism.

Chinua Achebe had led Africa out of literary darkness in 1958 with *Things Fall Apart*. Wole Soyinka produced five theatrical works between 1963 and 1965 that would earn him a reputation as Africa's foremost playwright. Ulli Beier's *Black Orpheus* magazine

provided a forum for writings from across Africa and its Diaspora; Beier's wife, Georgina, ran an experimental art school from which emerged such talents as Twins Seven Seven, Adebisi Fabunmi and Jimoh Buraimoh. The highlife music of E.T. Mensah swept across west Africa throughout the 1950s and 60s.

All of this, and more, was invoked by the curators, Okwui Enwezor and Olu Oguibe.

Very little of it, however, happened in Lagos.

Much came out of the celebrated Mbari Club, whose membership included not only Achebe and Soyinka, but also playwright Duro Lapido and visual artists Bruce Onobrakpeya and Uche Okeke. The Mbari Club was located in what the curators describe as 'the neighbouring city' of Ibadan. Ibadan is over a hundred kilometres north of Lagos. Oshogbo, host to the fervent creativity of the Beiers and their associates, is more distant still. E.T. Mensah was Ghanaian.

Does it matter?

The Lagos exhibit had a mildly pathetic feel to it. Simply put, there was not enough to fill the space; one wall was even covered with a set of family photographs – evocative, to be sure, but not of any 'creative flashpoint' – borrowed, in last-minute desperation one suspects, from a Nigerian family in England. Many visitors must have left the Tate Modern regarding Africa as something of a weak joke.

So much for London. In late May, Barcelona's Centre for Contemporary Culture opened its doors to *Africas: The Artist and The City*, reviewed in these pages by Carole Pearce.

The Director of *Africas*, Pep Subirós, was quick to take the measure of Lagos in his preparatory travels (which also took him to Dakar, Abidjan, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Harare), concluding after a few days in the noise and traffic of the city,

... surely it can't be a coincidence that all the most powerful Nigerian creators live outside Lagos, in Oshogbo, in Nsukka, in London or in Berlin.

Subirós is admirably candid about the way in which his ideas for the exhibition developed and unfolded, and in spite of the logistical difficulties he assembled an excellent survey of contemporary work. Having crossed swords in London with the sculptor Sokari Douglas Camp, and been

finessed onto the back foot by her indignation about ethnic pigeon-holing, he finds more comfortable repose in the Gasworks Gallery, where gentler souls, with a history of organising workshops around the continent, point him towards a number of artists in his chosen cities.

If Lagos was a physical nightmare for Subirós, Harare proves to be an existential one, and he spends his days here musing as much on the 'emigrate-or-stay' dilemma of his white Zimbabwean contacts – 'people', he judges, 'who can travel around the world, who can study at the best universities, who live in magnificent houses' – as on the works of black Zimbabwean artists who might be included in the show.

Having been unable to contact Bulelwa Madekurozwa, one of Harare's most distinctive painters, he visits Lovemore Kambudzi, a peerless chronicler of urban spaces, 'whose very suggestive work I saw at the Biennial held at the National Gallery. I could include him to replace Bulelwa, if she doesn't show up.'

'Doesn't show up'? This is the candid giving way to the arbitrary. Subirós meets Kambudzi in Chitungwiza: 'The kid is really young, and doesn't know how to deal with me, or what to say. Finally I manage to get him to show me three paintings hanging in a small dark room ... I don't know, I'll have to think about it.'

The decision had already been made to include Zimbabwe's Berry Bickle, along with El Anatsui and Godfried Donkor, in a 'prologue' to the exhibition, and the intention was to represent Harare with one plastic artist and one photographer, as was being done with the other cities. Having left Kambudzi dangling, Subirós decides that, 'for Harare I'll end up, if they agree, with three photographers.'

They do, and he does. But the striking urban essays of David Brazier, Calvin Dondo and Luis Basto are fused into a single video presentation; would it have hurt to insist on just one painter?

An uneasy feeling remains. Not just that Harare's story was not fully told – for no such story can ever be 'fully' told – but that it could have been told differently if only Madekurozwa had 'shown up', or Kambudzi had 'known what to say'.

The Editor

Africas:

The Artist and the City

Carole Pearce writes from Barcelona

One of the most interesting exhibitions I have seen recently opened in June 2001, in the heart of the ancient city of Barcelona, Spain. Housed in the elegant Centre for Contemporary Culture, it is described more accurately as a cultural than an art exhibition. This indicates that it is not only fine art that is on display, and that the curatorial interest is not focused solely on aesthetic questions. The collection represents the fruit of Pep Subirós's curatorial trip through Africa last year and his encounter with some artists in the cities of Lagos, Cape Town, Dakar, Abidjan, Johannesburg and Harare.

Pep Subirós is a philosophy lecturer turned cultural organiser and writer. His target audience and his preoccupations were, not unreasonably, European. Remarking that Europeans live in a kind of luxurious bubble, where they can ignore the real issues and problems that shape the world today, he believes that these issues and problems are best seen in Africa and are brilliantly grasped and expressed by contemporary African artists. This exhibition is therefore an opportunity for Africans to enrich European understanding and teach Europeans through images; to warn them and guide them about a future that lies ahead on the lip of time.

The 'urban', the 'rural': the past and the future

This corrective focus is in sharp contrast with large numbers of contemporary and ethnographic exhibitions of African art. The former are increasing in number but rarer than the latter, which are to be found in every major city in Europe and the USA, including, of course, the British Museum. Marvellous though many ethnographic collections are, there is no doubt that they tell the story of a decreasingly important aspect of contemporary Africa. Exhibitions of contemporary fine art are also rare within Africa itself; the majority (with honourable and important exceptions) being in small

galleries dealing with airport/armchair/mantelpiece – that is to say, tourist – art.

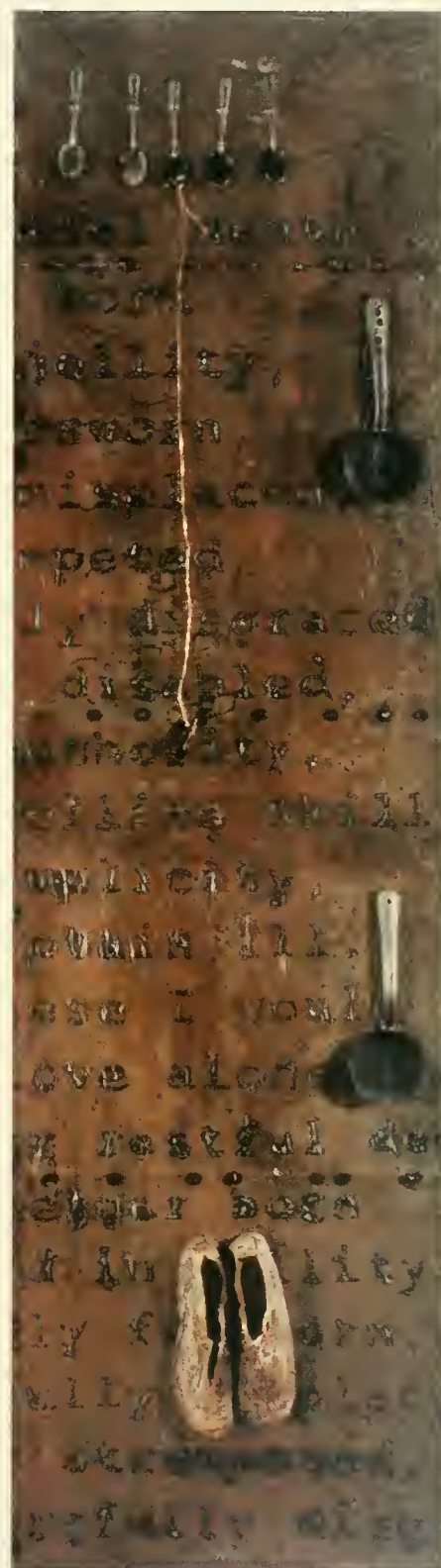
Yet our major artists and intellectuals live in the cities (if not in Africa, then in Europe or America) and this shapes the questions that preoccupy them. Thus, *Africas: the Artist and the City* is a carefully chosen reflection on the impact, problems and aesthetics of urbanisation in Africa and in Africanised cities elsewhere. It turns its back on the rural focus that would have included a great deal of what is currently produced (by urban artists working in stone) in Zimbabwe; it also ignores both the expressionist art that is being nurtured in places like Gallery Delta, and the sculptural and carved work that straddles the urban/rural dichotomy, such as that of Tapfuma Gutsa and Jackson Hlungwani. Indeed, Robert Loder, art collector and promoter, has rightly warned against a too-facile understanding of what constitutes 'urban' art, pointing out that many practising artists today have deep roots in concerns and identities that are partly constituted by the 'rural' and the 'traditional'.

European and African contemporary art

The works on display are also contemporary; both in terms of techniques, materials and approaches, and in terms of the anxieties, theories, experiences and beliefs that can be found in the works of a number of African artists today. Yet there was also a strong contrast, although it is hard to say in precisely what way, between the work of artists in this exhibition and that of their western-situated contemporaries.

Techniques and materials

This was not a matter of techniques or materials. One unexpected emphasis was the wealth of film work from the whole continent and beyond, to Africans living in the Diaspora. This should have occasioned no surprise. Those who were able to see the exhibition of the *Revue Noire* collection of photographs entitled *Africa by Africa: A*



Berry Bickle, *Sarungano*, 2001
220 x 750cm [detail, one of 12 panels,
220 x 60cm]
Mild steel, paper, mixed media: cup,
spoons, bottles

Photographic View at the Barbican in London two years ago will be aware of a long tradition of photographic studio portraiture in Africa, especially in West Africa, since at least Edwardian times. The contemporary interest in photography and video may be a consequence of a specifically African artistic exploration of reality; a quest that does not lead to naturalism or reproduction, but instead attempts to locate the truth underlying appearance.

All the same it was astonishing to see the range and power of contemporary African photographic work. The photograph in this exhibition displaces landscape and portrait painting: it obsessively explores the human face and form, including male and female nudes, as well as the spheres of public life, the city and the domestic interior. It is interesting that the domestic interior should be revived in Africa as an object of aesthetic interest. I was also particularly grateful for the nudes, having found this form of artistic exploration often neglected in our continent.

There was nothing about this work that could be called, in a limiting way, 'African', although artists who are also African can use as a resource tools and objects not available to non-Africans. Many, for instance, made use of the objects of African street life or of cultural relevance that they found interesting and significant – the cassava graters of El Anatsui, the *maxtuma*¹ and street objects incorporated into Viyé Diba's installations, the tin spoons and chipped enamel cups in Berry Bickle's installation, the sumptuous rags in which Dilomprizulike clothed and stitched his enormous theatrical pieces.

Presences and absences

The difference – if any – between western art and the African art shown here can be characterised more by half-felt absences and presences. In this exhibition what appeared to be absent was an interest in the decorative and the experimental: an abstract notion of art for art's sake. Instead, the pieces were saturated with a moral earnestness that was partly didactic, partly expressive, partly ironic. Present also was an energy and vitality, a sense of abundance, a focused enjoyment of the material world and a passionate engagement in the social and emotional which are not found in many western galleries, though it would be wrong to blur the very heterogeneous voices and different moods that distinguished one artist from another or to overstate the differences between western art and this work.

Moral engagement should not be mistaken for pompous moralising or social engineering, although there are often aspects of both in committed works like these. Indeed, in the three days of workshops that took place during the exhibition some artists seemed more concerned with the question of

apartheid than with art in Africa, and lost no opportunity to berate the white artists present for wholly imagined crimes. This seemed less upsetting to the victims than to the audience. It appears that the politics of protest in the run-up to freedom have not inured South Africans to undeserved attack, but, on the contrary, have made them feel they deserve it. It is to be hoped that for everyone's sake this victimisation of artists will cease to be desired or tolerated by both their attackers and the artists themselves.

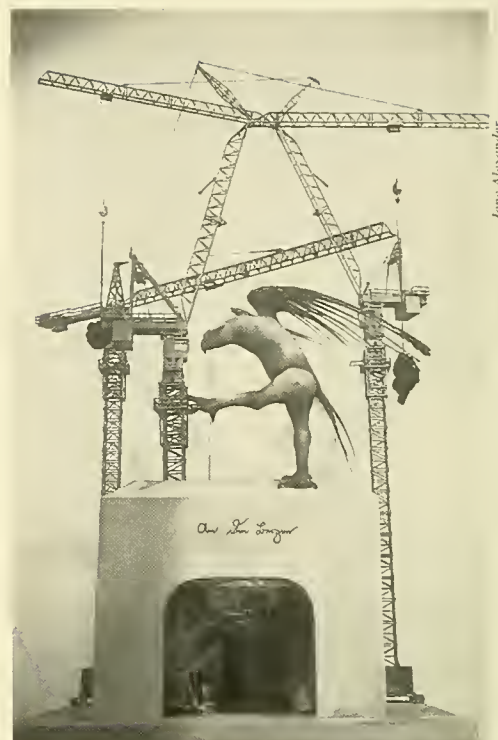
Whether they are of human or natural origin, objects in Africa have always been invested with symbolic and didactic meanings. The artist's moral engagement is primarily a continuation of this way of investing the world with significance. It is also a way of dealing with their own torment in a continent that has little to be proud of at the moment. Perhaps we can understand the contemporary African artist as a contemporary *griot*, working in a new medium. Many African artists live and work outside Africa and suffer for Africa, but – like the rest of us – see no clear way forward. For some this suffering itself becomes an object of the artistic quest.

This was particularly true of the self-wounding work shown by some of the South African artists. Of these I mention the work of Willie Bester of Cape Town, whose *Dog of War* and other works were encrusted with images of violence piled savagely one over the other; Jane Alexander's hallucinatory, pain-filled installations – *The Bom Boys*, commemorating the stunted lives of street children, and *Erbschien: An den Bergen*; Penny Siopis's large canvases minutely inscribed with images of the tragic history of conquest and brutality in South Africa.

A different emphasis is found in the work of photographers such as Zwelethu Mthethwa, who displayed gigantic, detailed and colour-saturated interiors of the homes of the poor, and the restrained black-and-white images of street life by photographer Santu Mofokeng. And of course few artists explore only the one facet of existence. Siopis presented a magical video, half-agonised, half-celebratory, *My Lovely Day*, devoted to a reinterpretation of the history of her own family, seen through the eyes of her Greek grandmother, a refugee, it appears, for most of her early life.

National differences

The twin giants of Africa, Nigeria and South Africa, seemed to mark the boundaries of inquiry and mood. Between these lay the tension and difference of emotional and aesthetic styles that absorbed artists from different countries. The Director of the Centre, Josep Ramoneda, believed that, if it were possible to characterise the styles of the artists exhibiting, it would be by the gradations of mood as one travelled from



(clockwise from above) Jane Alexander *Erbschien: An Den Bergen*, 1995
180 x 46 x 46cm, Wood, oil, paint, plaster, synthetic clay, aluminium, bird's wing, salt, found objects

Penny Siopis
Patience on a Monument, 1988
200 x 180cm, Oil on canvas

Zwelethu Mthethwa
Untitled, 1995-1998
120 x 170cm, Photograph

¹ a fat Senegalese satchel worn on the sides.

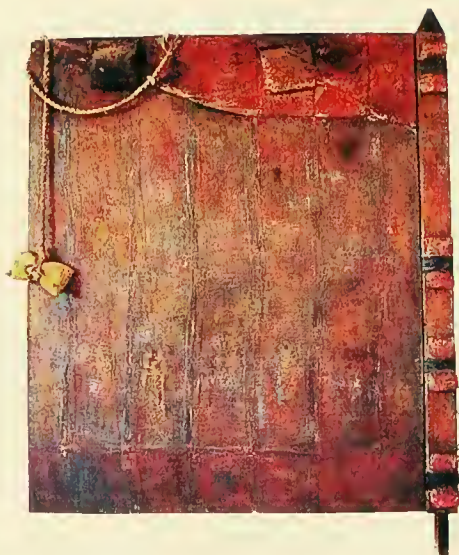


Reginald Vargas



Zachary Williams

Viye Diba
Matériaux et Composition
[Materials and Composition]
 2000
 183 x 143cm
 Mixed media



north to south. The mood of the Nigerian work is ironic and sad. It characterises the reassessment needed when there is a rupture with tradition in the course of modernisation. In Abidjan and Dakar a certain optimism asserts itself. The South Africans are still licking the raw wounds of past or present conflicts and representing them in all their violence and tragedy. In this context, the works of the Zimbabwean artists stand to one side, despite the current uncertainty in our country.

The aesthetic journey did not, of course, progress in a geographical direction only. Art historian Elsbeth Court reminded me that polar opposites were represented by the journey from the tragic Bickle installation and the El Anatsui *Wall* at the beginning of the show, to the Utopias of Bodys Isek Kingelez and Moshekwa Langa that are placed at the end.

A visual treat

The interest in basic politics verbalised at workshops was not found in all the works on display. Pep Subirós's selection of artists was personal, but, partly aided by *Revue Noire*'s Simon Njami, it was an excellent one, filled with visual treasures. A spectacular installation by Dilomprizukile, from Nigeria, *The Braggard* and *The Braggard's Wife* spelt out the greed and moral decay, dressed in the fabulous, that lies in the heart of individuals in contemporary culture. Dilomprizukile turned out to be as theatrical as his works, wearing bright colours which he had put together himself with big clumsy stitches.

Installations and murals by Viyé Diba from Senegal dwarfed another room; El Anatsui, from Ghana, filled a third with two enormous installations. One, *Crumbling Wall*, was a sculpture in which the blocks were constructed of discarded and rusty graters used for preparing cassava. The other, *Visa Queue*, consisted of tiny humanoid figures glued together in an endless snake facing forward. A series of photographs of voluptuous female nudes, their faces veiled, their bodies coated in mud, by Ousmane Dago Ndiaye, from Senegal, marked a portraiture halfway between art and commerce, between Eros and Thanatos. A well-known series of self-portraits executed by Samuel Fosso of Cameroon over 30 years since he was a teenager also ended with three nudes: one of himself reclining and the others showing him in hunted positions escaping from the camera. I found every single one of these self-portraits deeply disturbing. There were some interesting videos, including one by Patrice Félix Tchicaya, who lives in Paris. This was called *The Seventh Cycle* and showed a series of portraits of men and women staring unmoving at the camera for five minutes or more, accompanied by sound.



Dilomprizukile
The Braggard's Wife, 2000
 200 x 100 x 50cm
 Clothing and wood frames

It was delightful to find Bodys Isek Kingelez's *Project for Kinshasa in the Third Millennium* – the piece is well known but I had not seen it in the flesh before. My favourite of all the large pieces, however, was Berry Bickle's composed, elegant installation on 12 ceiling-high tin panels, *Sarungano*. This was the most classically beautiful and mysterious of all the works on show. Bickle's moral and intellectual seriousness, her focused creativity and her use of everyday domestic objects as rich metaphors for wide and deep truths mark her out as one of Africa's greatest contemporary artists.

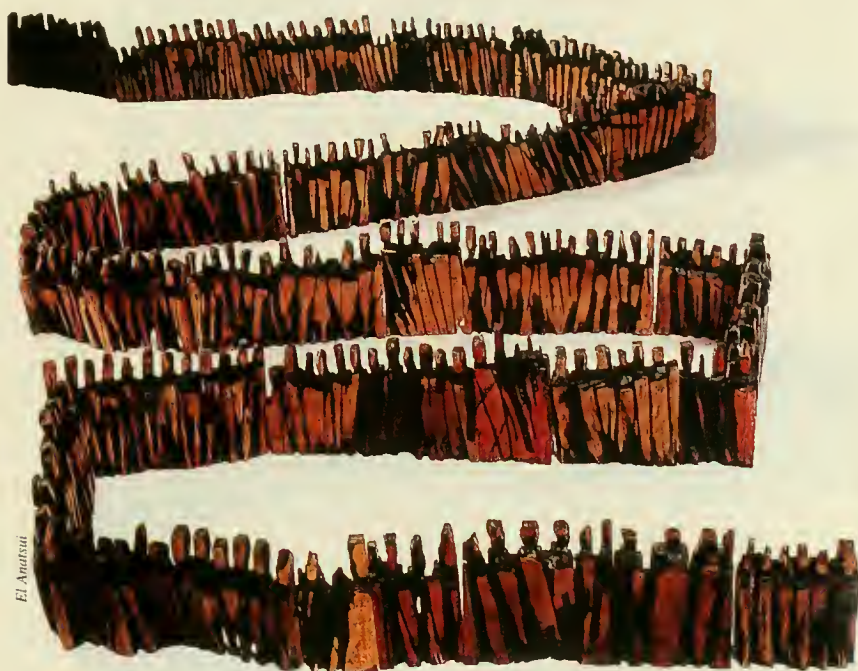
The exhibition was designed to allow us a glimpse of the many Africas that exist – in the cities of Europe, in the United States and elsewhere, as well as within Africa itself. The approach was descriptive not prescriptive, embracing not excluding.

In this pluralist conception of 'African' there were many collages showing the cities and city-life of Africa as well as those parts of Paris and London that have become Africanised. Some of these have been Africanised for centuries, as the restrained series of photographs by Joy Gregory reminds us. Each collage was accompanied

multiracial contingent, who had worked out a solution, however permeable and fluid, long ago. Luis Basto from Mozambique replied simply and politely to a questioner, 'The problem is not white or black – it is white *and* black'.

The catalogue

I enjoyed the catalogue less than I enjoyed the exhibition and Barcelona itself. The 70 pages of Pep Subirós's 'diary' provide an insight into his motives for mounting the exhibition and his quest for the artist and for the Africas they inhabit. The post-modern musings in some subsequent essays by other



Many Africas

One of the most important topics aired at the various workshops was the status of the term 'African'. This, one person observed, is a political term and thus open to contestation. Many white people born in Africa and producing art in Africa do not feel entitled to describe themselves as 'African'. Many black people who have made their homes in Europe, been to western art schools and married westerners, do. Some, all the same, object to being collected together under the common designation 'African', as Sokari Douglas Camp did. She was looking for a unity of theme or treatment; a characteristic 'African-ness' to make the collection hang together. Instead she found artists and works that did not seem to have anything to say to each other. These extreme and sometimes contradictory positions illustrate the political minefield that surrounds the term 'African' and indicate a level of pain and commitment that make for exciting art.

Pep Subirós did not try to circumvent dialogue on this score. He, at least, was clear that what needed to be shown was that urban artists with African roots are producing rich and exciting work that escapes stereotyping.

by a video of the city in question; in the case of Zimbabwe this showed local feature films such as *Flame*, and was augmented by a well-attended presentation of Harare street life produced by Luis Basto, David Brazier and Calvin Dondo. This compilation of the lyrical that can be glimpsed at the heart of daily life, and of political violence (Calvin Dondo's brave images of a political demonstration in Harare last Easter) does not seek to trivialise or glamorise poverty and the struggle for existence. As much as an essay in African urban life, it was a lesson in the scope of the photographic medium as a way to capture, use and play with light, transparency and opacity, with grain, shadow and form. The accompanying music was by Oliver Mtshudzi.

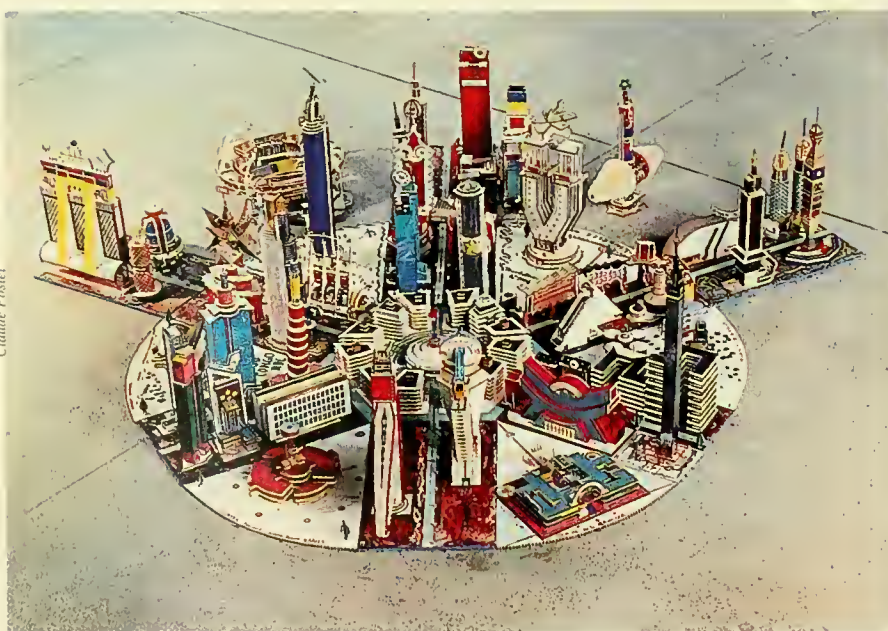
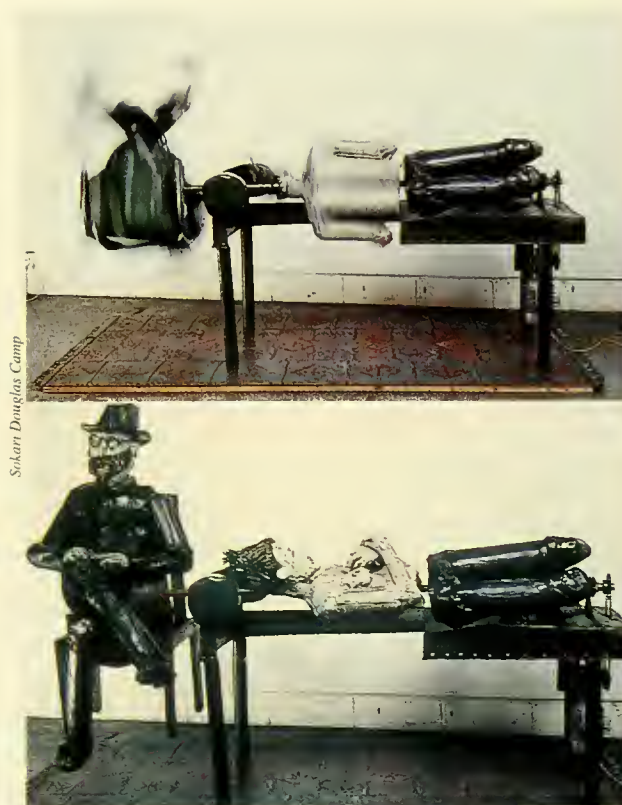
The sense of tolerance, pluralism and generosity – the inclusive rather than the exclusive concept of the African artist – was a useful rejoinder to the narrow, racist conception underlying some of the workshop discussions. One speaker pointed out that uncertainty about one's work and identity is in itself fruitful: 'Why not doubt? Dictators never doubt.' The torments of identity were not shared by the Zimbabwean



(clockwise) El Anatsui
Visa Queue, 1992
290 x 590 x 75cm aprox.
Oyili-oji, opepe and camwood

Godfried Donkor
Pure Ali, 1988
65 x 50cm, Collage on paper

Ousmane Dago Ndiaye
Femmes-terre [Women-earth] No. 7, 1998
150 x 100cm, Photograph



(top) Sokari Douglas Camp
Freud, White Sacrifice, 1998
155 x 127 x 255cm
Steel and electric motor


(above) Bodys Isek Kingelez
Projet pour le Kinshasa du troisième millénaire [Project for the Third Millennium Kinshasa], 1997
100 x 332cm diameter
Mixed media: wood, paper, board

authors are less helpful as a guide to the works themselves. A catalogue should serve as a reminder and description of the exhibition. Some art historians appear to imagine that the less lucid and more introverted the writing, the better it is. I do not agree.

As far as the images are concerned, art catalogues have a difficult task. The images should, I believe, convey the flavour of the exhibition without attempting to replicate them, though it is hard to see how this can be done. Catalogues can make contemplative works appear busy, grand works inconsequential, and intense works superficial. Texture and scale are lost and colour distorted. Perhaps the commentaries in the catalogue should focus more on conveying this flavour and less on private musings.

Conclusion

People who live, or have lived, in Africa share a wealth of images and attitudes, potentialities and concerns that distinguish them in some ways from those who have not. For the fortunate ones, culture, tradition, identity and the city are material to be explored and examined: they represent problems – formal, aesthetic, practical or moral – to be solved. They are enabling factors in the artistic quest. For the less fortunate they represent property to be fought over and owned, or territory to be policed and surrounded with barbed wire. It is to be hoped that artists will embrace the spirit of this exhibition and treat their own heritage as one resource among the many at their disposal rather than as a set of narrow and backward-looking prescriptions.

Ultimately, the artist's solution must be visual, not verbal or political. Zwelethu Mthethwa remarked that he focuses on black people in his work in order to explore and know himself better as well as to share his own knowledge of the dignity and creativity of lives in the ghetto. But artists look to the future, as well as to the past. The joyful statement of hope embodied in Bodys Isek Kingelez's *Kinshasa* testifies to this fact; and so do the carefully constructed towers and fairs, the stadiums and tower-blocks clad in glittering material. In 20 years' time, Sally Wade of Senegal said, most Africans will be city-dwellers. Artists and intellectuals can do what governments have not been able to do: prepare the city for its new inhabitants. African artists and intellectuals are engaged in the construction of an urban culture – a culture on which all else depends. 

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Elsbeth Court, Robert Loder, Josep Ramoneda and Pep Subirós for corrections, interviews and illuminating correspondence in the process of writing this article.



David Brazier

One day 3 perspectives

Murray McCartney reviews an installation of Zimbabwean photography in Barcelona

The same day, the same place: Harare. Or two. Harare. Mbare. The city awakes, if it can ever be said that the city sleeps. Three friends, accomplices, each with a different perspective, prepare to tour the city, and some of the cities within the city. Early morning transport: daily destinations written on the front of a bus. Movement, smoke and dust. Waiting, rushing, running. Luis Basto, David Brazier and Calvin Dondo take different routes. Basto and Brazier travel from the centre to the outskirts, leaving the administrative and business quarter and heading for the townships. From Harare to Mbare, Dondo takes the opposite route; from the outskirts he heads towards the centre.

[Pep Subirós, Catalogue entry, *Africas: The Artist and the City*]

Three photographers journeying through their city and recording a collection of its daily scenes. The project itself echoes the central metaphor of *Africas: The Artist and the City* – emphasised in its sub-title, *A Journey and an Exhibition* – tracking as it does some of the routes from tradition to modernity, from the local to the global, and casting flashes of light on the processes of urbanisation.

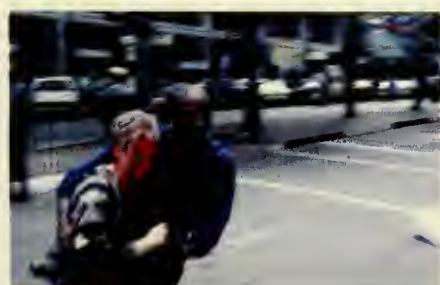
But there is a tension between the ‘fixed’ image of the large-format photograph and the imaginings of the artist; between the

reality in front of the camera lens and the intentions of the eye behind it.

Having decided to represent Harare through the medium of photography, Pep Subirós faced a curatorial dilemma. As he recollects it,

One basic issue was that the exhibition project focussed on the relation between contemporary art and urban life and transformation. This led me to include two different kinds of spaces. First and foremost, a series of spaces and rooms specifically devoted to art works which expressed, in my view, this thematic relation. Second, a series of ‘documentary’ spaces which gave

Calvin Dondo



contextual information about the cities where the participating artists were living and working.

Well, as you probably agree, the difference in (good) photography between 'art' and 'documentation' is often unclear, if any. This is the case, I think, with most of Calvin, David and Tucha's work. Their photos are both compelling documents and great works of art.

For many years, photography existed well beyond the pale of art; its welcome on the gallery walls is a relatively recent phenomenon. What, after all, could the camera do, other than relocate a frame of reality onto a rectangle of paper?

The photograph has long been a document of record, and even today consumers of the print media instinctively hold its authority in high regard. As Susan Sontag has suggested, the 'virtually unlimited authority' of photographic images in our society – their power to 'usurp reality' – is based on the fact that a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask.

To the extent that it is an 'interpretation of the real', however, it rests on sands as shifting as those found in literary fiction. Witness the frustration felt by the protagonist of Amitav Ghosh's novel, *The Shadow Lines*, recently arrived from Calcutta, touring London with an old family friend:

To her the Underground was merely a means of shifting venue: it would irritate her to see how excited I got when we stepped on to the escalators ... For God's sake stop carrying on like a third-world tapioca farmer – it's just the bloody Underground.

I could not persuade her that a place does not merely exist, that it has to be invented in one's imagination; that her practical, bustling London was no less invented than mine, neither more or less true, only very far apart. It was not her fault that she could not understand, for ... although she had lived in many places, she had never travelled at all.

Having decided that the Harare photographs were at once both art and documentary, Subirós faced the challenge of distinguishing the genres in his exhibition:

I saw many of their photos and I was unable to limit myself to use them in just the 'art' spaces or in just the 'documentary' spaces. That's how I thought of asking their permission to print some of the photos (about ten from each) for the documentary section, and to produce a video (a DVD, in

the exhibition) with about 200 pictures for the art section.

To emphasise the artistic dimension of the photos, I thought it was necessary to show them not just as a succession of autonomous 'slides', but as a sequence that gave an idea of a continuing work and of a special gaze exploring some specific fields and concepts. That's why I also introduced the movement, the close up, the repetitions.

Computer manipulation, a staple of commercial photography for years, has recently become available as a tool for artists. At the same time, photographers have begun to attract as much attention as painters from many European and American galleries, and some of them – the Düsseldorf School's Andreas Gursky and Thomas Struth, for instance – are considered among the leading artists of our time. Andreas Gursky himself started using the technology a decade ago, mainly as a retouching device – to delete elements he found distracting – but in the last few years he and others have been using it to alter and combine images in new ways, and this has led to a certain amount of critical muttering and theorising about photographic 'truth'. To Gursky, truth is a non-issue. Photographers, he argues, have been manipulating it ever since the eighteenth-fifties, when they learned how to retouch negatives, and the digital options made available by Adobe Photoshop and other programmes have merely extended what is a long tradition of photographic mendacity.

Although Subirós transformed the presentation of the images – *Sure, I was conscious of being an editor, a mediator, in the process* – he left their original integrity intact; it was the aesthetic of the presentation as well as the content of the photographs themselves, which shunted the video across the border from 'documentary' to 'art'. In her review of the exhibition, Carole Pearce suggests that,

As much as an essay in African urban life, it was a lesson in the scope of the photographic medium as a way to capture, use and play with light, transparency and opacity, with grain, shadow and form.

The mood of the final result is of course impossible to capture on the printed page (not least because of Oliver Mtukudzi's accompanying soundtrack). In basic form, it is a seamless ten-minute slide-show with more or less equal time given to the three photographers, opening with Basto and closing with Brazier. Some images are turned slowly in front of the camera; some are zoomed in and out of; in others the camera might follow the gaze of a person down to the object of his attention.



Luis Basto



Much of Luis Basto's sequence is a monochrome essay, opening with the early morning walk to work, rush-hour traffic, bus queues and crowded taxis, and closing with the sodium-lit colours of the city's evening. *En route*, vendors are seen polishing shoes and selling papers; hairdressers attend their clients; we follow spectators' eyes to the tense drama of a table-football game. Although many of Basto's subjects betray an understandable weariness and resignation, there is no shortage of energy, of purposefulness and cameraderie.

Calvin Dondo decided from the outset to paint a political picture. Rather than capture a random day-in-the-life of Harare, he chose the day of a demonstration, and his portion segues briskly from brightly-coloured portraits of city-centre street life to the menace and violence of confrontation: strong arms and strong expressions, the defiance of solidarity in the face of police resistance. In this sequence, Subirós highlights details of an image not by simply zooming in close, but by first masking out the unwanted material and leaving a small frame of colour on the otherwise black background, then enlarging the detail to fill the screen. The technique is very effective in emphasising particular motifs of the series. We see hands in close focus, for instance: raised in protest, holding up the riot control baton, pressed and stabbing against the chest of a demonstrator, helping an injured comrade away from the lines of battle.

The photographer himself had no role in this editorialising:

I knew he was going to combine the three perspectives, but I wasn't aware of how he would do it. When we got to Barcelona, it

was finished. I would probably have included some other images, to make the political perspective stronger, but I was impressed with the way he put things together.

In the closing section of the video, David Brazier's images are allowed a less mediated eloquence, opening with a passenger alighting from a dawn bus outside the city, and shifting straight to the terminus, where the faded colours of roof-loading activity are interspersed with the vivid hues of fruit-ices being sold in the passageways. Brazier chronicles the almost infinite variety of market trade, from motor spares to glistening fruit, and whilst much of the activity is solidly earth-bound, his use of urban horizons and silhouettes – against the sky, or the blue-washed expanse of a warehouse wall – gives many of the images an airy, 'roofless' feel. He captures, too, the rich colours of informal commerce, lingering over several beautiful examples: the rich, honeyed tones of cooking oil refracted in the sunlight; bright red tomatoes being sprinkled with water, which the camera catches in blurred, mid-air drops between hand and fruit.

Tres dies, tres mirades. It was an enterprise stalked by the dangers of compromise, tedium and cliché, but it outran them, and the result does the city as much justice as it deserves. ☞



Verena Nolte

c o l o u r



Hilary Kushnir

(above) Luis Meque
Umchadu, 1998
Mixed media

(right) Ishmael Wilfred
Pain with the Disease, 1997
110 x 110cm
Mixed media



Verena Nolte



(left) Richard Witikani
Two Sisters II
105 x 88cm
Oil on paper



(right) Shepherd Mahufe
Carrying Beef, 1998
70 x 55cm
Mixed Media

Verena Nolte

colour africa

colour africa was presented in Munich's *Rathausgalerie* (City Hall Gallery) in September/ October last year. In contrast to many exhibitions of African art in Europe, it was the result of a long collaboration and, as Verena Nolte observes in this review of the process, 'an attempt to establish new relationships in art, free of prejudices and market trends.'

The exhibition *colour africa*, which included over 60 works by eight artists from Zimbabwe, attracted large numbers of visitors and was received in the City of Munich, even with its over-abundance of cultural events, with great enthusiasm. Many of the over 8,000 visitors exclaimed in astonishment as they entered the *Rathausgalerie*. Comments such as 'How beautiful!' and 'How amazing!' were among the spontaneous reactions heard. Clearly, few visitors remained unmoved by this exhibition. Even the press, notoriously difficult to enthruse, was receptive to the images, and their writing lured more visitors to the City Hall exhibition venue.

For the organisers, and all those involved in creating *colour africa*, this reception seemed like a minor miracle. Not that they had no faith in the art from a country better known for its sculptures. They had after all been battling for years to finally exhibit these paintings – undreamed-of and unseen here in Germany – in an appropriate setting. But the euphoric reaction of an art public famous for its critical attitude could not have been predicted, far less the fact that practically all the works in the exhibition were sold.

So what happened? We in the northern hemisphere, in our tiny but prosperous Europe, have an image of the African continent which is characterised by ignorance, guilt and fear. Relations between ourselves and Africa are generally limited to aid programmes, and are tainted by outdated solidarity events or misunderstood safari tourism. In our newspapers and other media, with their penchant for sensationalism, we hear of violence, war, famine and death in Africa. Thoughts of the black continent prick a guilty conscience and so we tend instead to suppress the thought of Africa like an embarrassing suitor or consider the wonderful landscapes of Africa in isolation from the massive human problems.

But the pictures in our exhibition, produced by Zimbabwean artists, now created in the observer a link with Africa that was suddenly open and direct. The use of colour and materials seemed on the one hand familiar and also reminiscent of the expressive artists of the early 20th century who – as Michael Meuer, one of the curators, pointed out in the catalogue – can be shown to have been inspired by African art:

With its powerful use of forms and choice of colours, the work of the Zimbabwean artists shows a marked similarity to Expressionism and all its later manifestations. This is a fascinating instance of the development of a stylistic movement coming full circle, a movement which began in Europe around a hundred years ago, the driving force behind which was African art. The familiarity of this 'European' style makes it possible today to bring the artistic statements of these far-distant African lands vividly to life, cutting across all linguistic and cultural boundaries and thus rendering the message comprehensible. (*colour africa* catalogue, p.2).

Moreover, the images in *colour africa* communicated a freedom, a lack of inhibition, and exhibited a self-confidence which engaged observers in an emancipated dialogue and immediately released them from the burden of prejudices applied to the whole of Africa.

I do not think this assessment is an exaggeration. I had four weeks to observe the public and saw the same scenes played out over and over again, heard the questions which related sometimes to the personalities of the painters, but also to the scenes and people depicted. These were



and during which, in 1999, Jerry Zeniuk returned home – after a workshop with the artists in that same open-air arena where I met Luis Meque for the first and last time – with the news that there was art in southern Africa which it would be an honour to exhibit in Munich.

The date for Zimbabwean art in the *Rathausgalerie*, one of Munich's major public galleries, was set for September 2000. Although political relations between Munich and Harare were by then at a standstill, the City of Munich elders decided on the basis of an assessment by the German diplomatic representative in Harare, Fritz Hermann Flimm, that cultural relations should continue. Michael Meuer and I were able, at the last minute in July 2000, to travel to Harare and, with Derek Huggins, to put together the exhibition for Munich.

Besides the work of Ishmael Wilfred and Luis Meque, both of whom died young, the exhibition also included paintings by Richard Witikani, James Jali, Shepherd Mahufe, Patrick Makumbe, Lovemore Kambudzi and Misheck Musamvu. It is almost impossible for us here in Europe to comprehend how young and yet at the same time how mature the artists in Zimbabwe are. We assume from our experience that it takes years, decades, for artists to reach the peak of their achievement. 'But we don't have that much time', was the simple explanation offered in December by Hilary Kashiri, another Zimbabwean artist, who died earlier this year at the age of 32. He lived out his final – and for us, unforgettable – creative period as the holder of a scholarship from the Villa Waldberta in Munich.

The exhibition *colour africa* was not intended to be a unique event. It was, rather, an attempt to establish new relationships in art, free of prejudices and market trends. The German appetite for Zimbabwean art was by no means sated by *colour africa*. On the contrary, it was simply whetted. ♡

[Translated from the German by Carla Jackson]

understood and at the same time considered enigmatic and alien. The sense that they were encountering something previously unseen gave visitors to the exhibition the gratifying feeling that they were part of something new and unknown, something unexpected.

For everyone who had been involved in the creation of this exhibition since 1995 – when relations with Harare and thus with Zimbabwe were established through a city-twinning agreement – its success, the effects of which reached out well beyond the City of Munich, was an exhilarating compensation for the difficulties, doubts and resistance which had to be overcome along the way.

It all began with a meeting of two artists. The painter Helen Lieros, who was and still is intensely involved in tireless work towards the education of young Zimbabwean artists, was on a visit to the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich when she met New York artist Jerry Zeniuk, who has since 1993 been teaching in Munich.

It was Jerry Zeniuk who gave me the address of the Delta Gallery on my first visit to Harare for the Zimbabwe International Book Fair and insisted that I go there.

So it was that in Livingstone Avenue I saw for the first time the pictures whose colours astounded me, pictures which I found altogether amazing because, although prepared for many things abroad, one is unprepared for good paintings, which tend to be sparsely scattered in this world. On this first visit, in the middle of a small open-air arena, shaded by mature trees behind the gallery, I chanced upon an artist at work. I felt like an interloper, even though the artist didn't allow himself to be disturbed by my presence, and continued to fill with wild dark colours a large sheet of brown paper which was lying on the ground. 'Luis Meque' said Derek Huggins, the gallery owner. 'He paints here sometimes.'

This first sight of the contemporary art of Zimbabwe and my unsuspecting meeting with one of its leading artists was the message I took back to Munich. It was to be five years, five long years during which Munich artists, city councillors and others were to visit the Delta Gallery; years during which

14 Derek Huggins promoted his artists in Harare and Munich

(top) Patrick Makumbe, *Woman Knitting* 2000, 79 x 61cm, Oil on paper

(below) James Jali, *Second City*, 2000 90 x 94cm, Gouache



Hilary Kashiri

Tributes

Hilary Kashiri, one of Zimbabwe's finest young painters, died in May. Born in Mazowe in 1968, he joined the BAT Workshop in 1990 and became a regular exhibitor at Gallery Delta following his graduation two years later. The National Gallery of Zimbabwe honoured him with its Young Artist of Promise award in 1993, and he subsequently won commendation from the Gallery for his photography and graphics, as well as his painting.



Hilary was more than just an exhibitor at Delta, he was part of the family: breathing his warmth and energy into the space, lending a hand with whatever work needed to be done, welcoming visitors to what was very much his second home.

Derek Huggins draws on his diary for the last few days, reflecting on Hilary's life and work.

Friday 18 May 2001

Hilary is dying. Nobody wants to admit this, to say it outright, but everybody is, I believe, thinking it. Matilda is coming to terms with this and beginning to admit the possibility. She is an emancipated, independent and strong woman and she is facing the reality and the possibilities with courage.

Hilary has not been looking well for about a year: a weight loss to a long, lean frame and discoloration of the skin, particularly about the

(top) Hilary Kashiri

(above) Hilary Kashiri,
Barn, 1998,
75 x 100cm,
Mixed media

face and the neck. He looked better when he returned from Munich in early January. He came to the opening of Richard Di Rosa's exhibition on 20 March and when greeting him and holding him by the upper arm I was surprised to feel him so thin. Soon after, he went to bed with a cold for two weeks and then, following a collapse, he received treatment at the Trauma Centre. In a letter to me dated 31 March, he talked about blood tests and anaemia and 'white fighting cells' which were 'not fighting'. He continued, 'I do not know, Derek. There is a time for everything. Maybe this is my time.'

During April he was up and about at home, but walking with a stick. He received visitors and was brave and outwardly cheerful. For the past two weeks he has been in the West End Clinic where he has been treated for pneumonia from which he recovers slowly, but he has additional complications with his stomach and with his bowels, which are perforated. His voice is but a whisper. He is too weak to undergo an operation. He lies, thin and wan, his eyes very large in his shrunken face. He is under stress both with his breathing, and psychologically. It is very sad. I hate to see him like this, to be part of a crowd of visitors who have little to say and just stare aghast. Nobody wants to admit – nor dares to say – that his resistance to disease is deficient and that he is dying, if not now, then soon. We are powerless to help him. It is so very sad.

We lost Ishmael Wilfred (aged 29), Luis Meque (33) and Fasoni Sibanda (27) in 1998. And now we have to face the prospect of the early death of yet another of our young painters whom we selected, nurtured, encouraged, supported and promoted through the nineties. It will be another tragic loss, not only to his wife and Moma and family, but to art and to the city and the nation, to the Gallery and, of course, to ourselves personally. Artists do not grow on trees, but they grow like trees, slowly; they need tending, and while we watch, they gather strength and confidence and produce fruit. That is the satisfaction. And then they are withered or cut down and are gone. That is the tragedy in a series of tragedies. It can be likened, I think, to the losses of the First World War, when thousands in their prime were cut down and destroyed. Such is the phenomenon we face. Such is the epidemic we face. We can influence a little but we cannot control and we cannot change the passions of man. There must be a spiritual transformation and a change in social habits. God help us all. All we can do is to warn, and to help when the need arises. We have been nurturing artists for twenty-five years; now, I fear, I am too old to find and bring many more to maturity. The young painters seem destined to be short lived. They are becoming famous. They are dying young. They are becoming history quickly. We are losing our best painters as they reach maturity.

Tuesday 22 May, 2001

We buried Hilary today. He died on Sunday 20 May, in the afternoon.

On Sunday, I had gone to Chipoko Cave in the Chinamora Communal Lands with Beatrice and the boys, Maurits and Taco, fulfilling a promise to take them on an excursion into the country. We had parked the car and walked, with packs on our backs, through the kraal line. We greeted people and their children; we remarked on their cockerels and goats and donkeys. And then we followed the streambed and climbed up onto the rock and sat under the overhang, admiring the rock paintings and the view across the yellow veldt to the hills in the distance. We ate and drank simply: bread and cheese, fruit and water. The boys played a game of sliding down the smooth and slippery rock on their stomachs, and then climbing up to slide down again. We laughed with them, and at their antics. It was fun.

We returned to the city in the early afternoon and had lunch. Later, I

16 retired to my bed feeling unwell. I did not hear the phone. I awoke



Hilary Kashira

just before six and thought of Hilary but it was too late to go and see him. I was feeling very unwell; I went to bed and slept through the night. Matilda called me early next morning and told me the news. It came as no surprise. I did not regret not seeing Hilary again. I did not want to see him wasted and spent. And he too, in his condition, would not have wanted to see me. It was his time to meet his maker alone and without encumbrance. I was relieved when the priest said today at Braeside church that he had visited Hilary on Saturday night when he was very ill and had administered the last sacrament.

Hilary was a student of the BAT Workshop in 1991-92 and we first showed his work in the Young Artists Exhibition of January, 1993. He became a regular exhibitor from 1994 and was part of the 'New', 'Different', 'Changing Directions' and 'Crossroads' exhibition series through the reminder of the nineties which encompassed a group of young painters: Luis Meque, Richard Witikani, George Churu, Fasoni Sibanda, Shepherd Mahufe, Ishmael Wilfred and, latterly, James Jali, Lovemore Kambudzi and Patrick Makumbe. Hilary, a well-educated and refined young man, worked as an assistant at the gallery for three or four years. He was a close friend of Luis Meque, with whom he shared time and exploits, and of Richard Witikani and George Churu.

Unlike his contemporaries, who have concentrated on the figure and on social commentary, Hilary worked semi-abstract paintings involving the landscape. I think he was influenced by the works of Henry Thompson and Helen Lieros which he saw often at the gallery. He worked oil on paper – not a difficult medium – also oil or acrylics on canvas. His breakthrough occurred at the Thulepo Workshop in Cape Town in 1995 with a painting of the mountain in which he resolved his spatial dilemmas. He grew in confidence and status as a painter, and undertook a one-person exhibition ('Recent Paintings in the Spirit of New Directions and Crossroads') at Gallery Delta in 1998 which was highly successful and established him as an important painter (see *Gallery* 18).

I am at a loss that Hilary has gone. I am so sorry that he had to go when he was yet young. But I have not wept for Hilary. I have not been caught with the goitre-like lump in my throat and sobbed, as happened when Luis died. And yet I was fond of and attached to them both. Perhaps it is because I knew for months, even before he went to Munich, that he had little time, and I was prepared for the eventuality. Perhaps it is because we have now lost four of our young painters from the original group of seven in the early nineties. Perhaps it is because the warnings were ignored. Perhaps it is because we are getting used to death and are becoming immune to the thought of it. Let that not be the case. At the Granville Cemetery this morning there were no fewer than four burials happening in the same hour. And as we left, new cortèges were arriving. It is a time of dying. Everybody knows someone who has died recently. It is a calamity. It is catastrophic.

I think of Hilary with fondness and sadness. Fondness, because we were close, we confided in each other and worked together. Sadness, because he has gone before he was able to express all that he had to say. It is difficult to accept that he too has gone, that there is another void. We used to sit and talk across the desk in my office, or on the veranda. In the early days he expressed his misgivings about surviving as a painter; I encouraged him by saying that the opportunities would come, and he would succeed. And this was so. He saw there was a way, and he pursued it vigorously. Latterly, there were times when he expressed his misgivings about the state of the country and the economy. He said that he felt shame and embarrassment to be a Zimbabwean within the current wave of national wrong-doings.

Hilary was very sensitive. He was studious-looking, and gentle of voice and manner. He was good and kind to his fellow artists. He faced his end with fortitude. God rest his soul. His passing is a great loss to painters and painting in Zimbabwe. He will be remembered in the annals of the country's art.

Our sympathy and condolences to Moma, Matilda and Panashe.

Beyond Zimbabwe's boundaries, Hilary proved to be an admirable ambassador for his country and his art. Not long before his death, he spent several weeks as a guest of the City of Munich, Harare's municipal twin in Germany, at a retreat in the Villa Waldberta.

The German critic Andreas Nentwich remembers the time, and the man.

A cold day in early winter, illuminated in white-gold by a small intense sun. Our first destination was the church of the secularised Rottenbuch monastery, a basilica built in the autumn of the Middle Ages but still conceived in the Romanesque style, small-windowed and heavy-walled, the interior positively consumed by licking Rococo flames.

Eva, a Berlin theatre director and nomad, and I, a critic resident in the south-west of the Republic, wanted to show Hilary, the tall slim black man from Zimbabwe, something of Bavaria; we wanted, I think now, to bask in a rapture for art and landscape in which we, with our complex Fatherland heritage, could never fully indulge.

We didn't know each other very well at the beginning of the day. We were each recipients of stipends from Villa Waldberta, an Alpine edifice set above Lake Starnberg and rendered as a fairytale castle by the extravagant taste of the late-eighteenth century. The Munich cultural authorities make the Villa available as a temporary residence to writers, translators and artists from around the world.



(left) Hilary Kashiri, *Untitled*, 1999
Oil on paper

(above) Hilary Kashiri, *Backyard*, 1998
85 x 46cm, Oil on canvas

We were united – besides by the coincidence which had thrown us together ten days before – only by the thin threads of deliberate open-mindedness: enquiring but tactful; curious, but at pains not to overpower; carefully reined in and poised for withdrawal. In addition, long after we all – we three and the two other residents who couldn't join us this day – felt released from the compulsion to account for these days of complete retreat, days which Hilary once described as 'clouds around the head', we continued superstitiously to chant our mantra that the lives of writers and painters were a constant battle for tranquillity, and that they were often writing and painting even when, in the eyes of more conventional workers, they were doing nothing at all.

Along the way, almost furtively, we became friends. We sought each other out. And the creaking, elegantly ageing castle was able in its declining years to experience how invigorating it can be to be occupied by a community of unrestrained and irreverent residents, a community in which no one avoids anyone else: that had much to do with this little trip on which we discovered so many common



Hilary Kashiri



Hilary Kashiri

(top) Hilary Kashiri, *Landscape*, 2000, Mixed media

(above) Hilary Kashiri, *Shed*, 2000, Oil on paper

18 (right) Hilary Kashiri, *Lost City*, 2000, Mixed media

feelings and used the same words to try to describe them, so that in the new territory which we each represented for the other there was, despite all the ethnic and cultural characteristics, nothing inherently alien, and indeed this could often be understood by telepathy. On this day we three opened ourselves to one other, determined to conquer that place – the ‘Waldberta’.

It all started around lunchtime, when the carefully constructed harmony evaporated and the masks fell – thanks to Hilary and to the fact that Eva and I stubbornly held out against him.

Hilary didn’t like Rottenbuch. He roamed aimlessly around the church, untouchable, and during our food break was disgruntled, taciturn and cool: ‘No more churches.’ Had the splendour offended him? But was he not, as I had heard, a devout Catholic? Eva and I still wanted to see the pilgrimage church in Wies, and our determination – not entirely unembarrassed but brooking no discussion – was the making of us.

It bathed us in light, all three of us, a house of respite, throbbing and vibrating on all sides with devoutly rapturous worldliness under the glow, the oscillation, the flood of the Catholic splendour of the hereafter. Hilary recorded all the extraordinary *trompe l’œil* with his camera and, outside again, we saw, above the meadows lightly dusted with snow and the celebrated Rococo treasure, the blue-white Bavarian skies which the brother of ‘Wies’ architect Dominikus Zimmermann, Johann Baptist, had copied in the vaulting over 250 years ago.

What had happened? The guest from Africa had proved he was not biddable, he had no intention of reeling in constant awe at the artistic heritage of the Occident. His eyes were no less sensitive, critical or discerning than our own; on the contrary, in Rottenbuch it was he alone who had perceived disharmony in the unresolved tension between that which is called the ‘art of building’ in old books, and an ornamentation which triumphantly and garrulously overlay the silent solemnity of the great, austere spaces.

In the Wies church on the other hand, everything stemmed from the realisation of a single idea, a representation of the sky, one unified spiritual impulse. The painter recognised that at a glance, he who clearly discerned real from unreal, and not only in art, as was to be shown again and again in the future. We could stop looking after the man from Zimbabwe – and relax. He had proved to be a person who was perceptive and sharp-sighted, susceptible to enervation, cheerful, moody and autonomous. He was quite simply an artist, an individualist. What, besides our individuality, was the difference between us?

We passed Neuschwanstein, small and grimy-grey, we stood above the Lech waterfall, we walked alongside an icy-clear mountain lake. ‘Christmas feeling,’ said Hilary, and we decided that this was Christmas for us, this 18th of November. No sound except the crunch of six boots in the snow. The sun showed itself only in its reflection on the grey massifs. Twilight. We three the last people on earth, bound by fate.

Once again it was Hilary who got to the heart of the matter, ‘We are a team.’ At supper in a gastronomic chamber of horrors packed with Bavarian kitsch there were words such as ‘gratefulness’ – emphatic moments between the jocular banter of those who have just discovered they like each other. Hilary talked in his charming sing-song English; giving vent to his feelings he expressed his bitterness over the plutocratic pseudo-democracy of the Mugabe regime, the greed-based tax system, the poverty, the dying in a country where the average life expectancy, reduced ever further by AIDS, was less

than 40 years and where death inevitably surrounded the friends of a 32-year-old.

There was his pining for his two-year-old son, from whom he would be separated for another seven weeks; the almost equally powerful fear that soon he would once again have to fight for the tranquillity he needed for his work from the bosom of an extended family all clamouring to have their needs met and seeking constant communion with him; his fear of the series of intransigent, mini-battles in an environment offering little feedback to artists who failed to pander to the folk-lore demands of an art scene largely dominated by bureaucrats or to the clichéd view of Africa held by the majority of affluent 'First World' collectors.

Would they strike again here, when he came to sell his as yet unpainted pictures? Already Hilary lived in the light and shade of that distant day when it would be decided whether he could return to Harare vindicated, a rich man with a little cash in the magical German currency and a painter of unquestionable standing, politically not beyond suspicion but to be handled with care due to his prominence in Germany. 'I am an artist,' he informed us, and that does not mean just being uncompromising and authentic, but also to be always and everywhere in search of perfection.

After that we had a lot of good times together, talked a lot, cooked, drank, laughed and partied together. And we worked. In Hilary's studio the lights often burned well into the small hours of the

morning. In the end time ran out. Of course each of us had achieved less than the least ambitious of our plans; the temptation is to want to do everything, distractedly instigating new projects, fighting for tranquillity, ever eager not to miss out on the enthusiastic get-togethers of the others. Departure, foreseen as a melancholy celebration, comes too quickly, parting words come out as the embarrassed closing remarks of anticipated elegies.

My best last day wasn't the very last but rather the one on which our friend Hilary became a 'rich' man. He sold almost everything, at rock-bottom prices, 'but it's okay'. Several larger works, like the metaphysical landscape with the discarded ballot box, and the head of an African potentate with thoughts swarming in the form of flies around his head, were practically given away, we all know that. Visitors who didn't buy grumbled that the paintings were too cheap. I could afford one and was torn for a long time between a blue-purple maelstrom with a drumming figure, and a meditative abstract closed to all sides. I liked that, that has always been my world. In the end I went for the drum maelstrom, and still now, as I turn my head towards it, I don't regret it: my new territory. We sat in the studio until dawn, finally in the constellation from that outing, freezing, intoxicated and yet clear-headed because Hilary didn't want to be alone in his happiness.

He left a few days after me. We, his friends from the 'Waldberta', kept on trying for months to find ways to get Hilary another stipend in Germany. We were so confident of seeing him again.

Eva Diamantstein, born in Munich and now working as a theatre director in Berlin, adds her own recollection of Hilary's company at the Villa in Feldafing.

'Hilary died yesterday' – a statement that sounds all wrong – 'Hilary died yesterday' – try as I might, I can't take in the reality of this statement. 'Hilary died yesterday'. I look at the picture he gave me as a present when he left: one (or two?) figures walking along an endless, crooked corridor. Warm colours, lots of brown, red, pink, ochre, yellow; painted on a background of blue and green, which lends depth. There is much desolation in the picture, a lonely path.

I think of my first encounter with Hilary, late at night in the dark foyer of the Villa Waldberta. I didn't know that he (or she?) had already arrived, just that an artist from Zimbabwe was expected sometime, and he had for days been under the impression that he had ended up in a haunted castle of which he was the sole occupant. We both had a bit of a shock. I invited him into my room because he seemed so lost and I had felt the same sense of isolation in my first few days here, intimidated by the tranquillity and luxury of the place.

I can't say that this was the beginning of our friendship. I had to fight for him, he did not succumb so easily to my curiosity. The friendship between us developed slowly, almost warily. We studied each other. He didn't want to be enveloped in any well-meaning fussing, any pity for Africa or voyeuristic interest in a perceived exoticism, and I didn't want him to misinterpret my interest as purely ethnological.

I paid him frequent visits in his studio. I can see him there still, in front of his pictures, which changed from day to day, growing less restrained; in front of that picture which was the first one he started and on which he continued to work right up until the opening of his exhibition: 'Two worlds', Zimbabwe-Feldafing, an extreme, an inaccessible painting, irreconcilable and only seemingly more naïve



Hilary Kachari

that his later work. An orange-yellow window. Two reflecting landscapes. Below, water, a lake perhaps, ornamental, almost childish. Above, red and purple, an industrial landscape choked by toxic smoke. Zimbabwe. A strip of blue gauze dressing at once separates and binds the locations, incurable, unbridgeable. I know he was pleased that I liked that picture in particular.

'Hilary died yesterday'. I try again, still I don't succeed. Africa is far away. A place which I know exists, but which nevertheless remains imaginary, my vision of Africa. Death is a step further still. It is not real, it is even more intangible than this Africa that I do not know.

I can see him on our trip to the Wies church, and in the winter. Hilary in the snow, like a cat. By the lake in Austria, a walk through a Christmas card or through the looking-glass, quite peaceful, wonderland. Or on the group trip to Murnau. We were of one mind on Frau Münter's paintings: too fearful, too idealised, too conventional, suppressive. 'Life is much harsher,' Hilary said, 'it is criminal in art not to look properly, and to trivialise.' Just as it is criminal to sell out to the spirit of the times or to an easily-digestible folklore (he was uncompromising as far as that was concerned). His amazed – emancipated – laugh when he said, 'I wouldn't even like to be buried in this place.' I don't think he liked Murnau very much.

We didn't give a second thought to his health. Perhaps we didn't want to look too closely. On reflection, I remember how very much sleep he needed and how it bothered me that a minor injury, like a twisted ankle, could swell so quickly and so severely. No, we didn't want to see.

He got to know several of Munich's second-hand shops and gave me some good tips on what could be purchased cheaply where. It was there that he bought the many souvenirs for his family and for himself, including an elegant dark-red jacket for his preview. He looked very good in it. We were all excited and kept working out in advance how much money he would be able to take home with him if he managed to sell all his work. We had at least grasped that Zimbabwe was a poor country. On that evening we behaved like art dealers, Andreas, Beqë and I, trying to explain the pictures to the guests, to encourage them to buy. We were convinced by his painting because we could appreciate its authenticity and it became for us a personal cause to convince others too. The exhibition was a resounding success. Hilary was by the end jubilant, intoxicated and restless, and so were we. I can still see him at around six o'clock in the morning starting on a new little series of pictures: blue sketches of men in conversation, on the way out, going somewhere...

The last time I saw him was the night before he left. He was sombre and anxious, and he told me more about himself and his life in Zimbabwe than he had in all of the previous weeks. He talked of how difficult it is there to secure the solitude which is so essential for work and how much he hoped for the opportunity to return. He would have liked to have stayed longer. We talked right through until morning, listening to Billy Holliday and drinking many bottles of wine, then he had to go, to pack his cases. He was booked on a morning flight. That was yesterday, on 30th December. And now it is spring.

On the back of the picture I have from him are a few words scribbled in pencil. Reflections on titles for his work:

Displacement
Two worlds
Givers / Suckers Talkers
Grazing
Stand by me

Protest
The search I / II
Confusion

crossing a grey line
without arriving aimlessly breathing
into no tomorrow no yesterday
for a while we remain silent
before that
which was
which is
which was

forgetting one world without finding another
never again seeing someone else's smile

nothing suggests anything

the blink of an eye
much longer than

We talked a great deal about his work and we drank a lot, ate and clowned around too, in the evenings in the *Bierstüberl* or at the *Poelt*, on trips together.

Later he was often as close to me as a brother, when we talked about the artist's responsibility to remain incorruptible, about the necessary solitude and how we found it. And yes, we stayed up all night discussing less existential questions too, eating pizza with Andreas, watching German detective series with lots and lots of red wine, and beer, and schnitzels, and laughter. ☞

[translated from the German by Carla Jackson]



Hilary Kashiri

The satiric paintings of Lovemore Kambudzi

By Anthony Chennells

Africa has a long tradition of satire in its songs, poems and oral narratives. Even that apparently most obsequious of forms, the praise song, which lists a ruler's strengths and virtues can satirise the ruler through the extravagance of its hyperbole. Praising the ruler as a cow which never lets its calf go hungry or as an elephant which tramples everything underfoot may imply genuine admiration for generosity and strength, but it can as easily be a satiric reminder to a parsimonious ruler that generosity should mark his relationships with his people or to a belligerent one that he should temper his actions with discretion. The Zulu praise poem 'Ndaba' begins,

Ndaba, son of Sonani, they say, 'What wrong did he do? / Since the people are living with their herds / Belonging to Mababela's people of the Gabela clan.'

The poem celebrates a successful cattle raid but it refuses to enthuse unambiguously about Ndaba's military prowess. The apparently puzzled question 'What wrong did he do?' provokes the ironic answer that the herds of Ndaba's people belong to someone else. And at the end of the poem Ndaba is represented as living in constant fear of reprisals,

With his shields on his knees / Watching over the herds of those who meditate evil / Against Mababela's people of the Gabela clan.

On one level, these lines describe a man who protects his people but they also refer to a leader who has acted beyond the law. The satire depends on the confusion of ownership that the ironies point to throughout the poem. Ndaba is forced to be vigilant because the cattle that lawfully belong to him and his people are at risk from a counter-raid of Mababela's people trying to recover their beasts and seize Ndaba's cattle in turn. The raid may have been successful but by raiding Mababela's people, Ndaba and his people 'meditated evil' and

have provoked their enemies. All satire has as its end reformation, and the path of reform is traced when deviance is tested against the customary, excess is placed alongside restraint, and the unruly is registered against what is measured and proportioned. Satire confirms the normative by showing how norms have been transgressed. In the Ndaba praise song, the ideal ruler can be glimpsed in the poem's irony: we know what norms should govern a ruler by being reminded of what he has failed to do and the wrong that he has done.

The most common visual satire in contemporary Africa is the newspaper cartoon, although of course not all cartoons are satires. I shall imagine a satiric cartoon directed at Africa's men of power and the wealth that accompanies power. Features of the people being satirised are exaggerated. Multiple chins, paunches, huge toothy smiles on mouths that seem at once to slobber greedily or ooze charm dominate our impression so that the ordinary proportions and symmetry of a person's body are lost. The cartoon renders them icons of greed and self-indulgence and if the cartoonist places them side by side with impoverished people in tattered clothes, they seem to have waxed fat at the expense of Africa's masses. In my imagined cartoon, the normative is registered by its absence. The gross and the emaciated are both deviations from what is humanly desirable but we know that a moral human dimension lies in the space between obscene wealth and obscene poverty.

Norm and the related words normal, normality and normative are problematic terms if, as I have claimed, these are the concepts that satire affirms. Social norms are culturally relative and it is likely that the reader, listener or viewer will recognise the satirist's intentions only if she or he agrees with the satirist about what constitutes acceptable behaviour. The newspaper cartoon usually addresses issues that are ephemeral, the news of the moment, and the norms for such cartoons are the partisan

positions within political processes that change from month to month. In Zimbabwe, *The Herald's* cartoonists for example would never draw President Mugabe as a man dilapidated with age and incapable of governing; and a reader who sees him as a competent leader would regard as defamatory misrepresentation a cartoon in the *The Independent* or *The Standard* which shows him as senile and ineffectual. Satire is, however, at its least interesting when it is reinforcing the current prejudices of one or another political party. It has the potential to become important art when it is lifted above the convictions of the moment. Swift may have been satirising the English court when he placed Gulliver among the Lilliputians, a giant among a nation of quarrelsome and pretentious midgets, but Swift's satire is not solely dependent on the contemporary rivalries for office and promotions at the Hanoverian court. Any political institution that depends on patronage to promote loyalty is the subject of Swift's satire. The most powerful satire is one that does not only depend on contemporary issues but rather forces us to see transgressions of morality and decency in familiar attitudes and behaviour. The satire itself makes possible our responses and teaches us simultaneously morality and its subversion. Great satire invites us to recognize and reject corruption concealed by a mask of integrity, the mediocre that pretends to be talented, and power that demands respect that it has not earned through a competent exercise of its authority. Satire invariably sets up a tension between an ideal that some person or group may project and a normative ideal that has been betrayed.

One of the reasons for my enthusiasm for Lovemore Kambudzi's work is that it makes



us reconsider our habitual reality. This is what all good satire should do because satire is concerned to recall us to social values that nurture and protect our humanity. Kambudzi's art is a socially committed art that reminds us that what we have begun to take for granted in our public life is what we should find unacceptable. His art shows that the moral norms that should inform our society have been ignored, and when we respond to his art we are responding in part to the failure of the ideals that we once believed Zimbabwe would promote. These various responses can be recognized in the huge oil *Parirenyatwa Hospital*. Kambudzi does not attempt an accurate representation of any of the buildings of Harare's largest hospital. The unplastered brick walls and corrugated-iron roof of the building, its porch a ramshackle corrugated-iron sheet on unplanned poles, fill the background of the painting and bear no resemblance to the real hospital which, although it shows signs of neglect, was designed with a professionalism wholly absent in

Kambudzi's building. What is represented in its stead is a travesty of a hospital. The painting is constructed around central vertical and horizontal axes but the vertical line that follows the wall of the building is drawn out of true, as if the whole building is about to collapse. Waiting patients sit on benches in the open while a nurse takes notes, and in the same quarter of the painting two policemen follow another nurse pushing a manacled man in a wheelchair. Nurses and policemen are equivalent figures of authority constructed in the painting as uncaring at best and brutal at worst. The colours of the dress of a pregnant woman in the foreground are lighter than are any others in the painting and the eye of the viewer is drawn to her and her belly. The imminent birth – her grimace suggests that she is in labour – is hardly a symbol of hope, for the child will be born into a world without order, love or direction. Above the pregnant woman, two men carry something that could as easily be a bier as a stretcher, its burden a corpse or a patient. The



Derek Huggins



Derek Huggins



Derek Huggins

confusion between the living and the dead, the officers of healing and the officers of the law, is confirmed by the way in which Kambudzi applies paint to his canvas. His paintings are largely composed of *taches* which although, as Fiona Gaskin observes, in its meaning of 'splotch...suggests something uncontrolled or accidental' can describe a process that is 'controlled, directional and programmatic'. This is hardly surprising since as Gaskin notes 'the *tache* has its roots in both the constructive brushstroke of Cezanne and the more

numinous dabs of Impressionism and Pointillisme'. Certainly there is nothing uncontrolled in Kambudzi's use of *tache*. Although the outlines of figures and objects in the paintings are strongly drawn, within the outlines, his *taches* both mould the principal figures and objects and are repeated in the faceless crowds, the walls and the earth. Visually the people are made to seem a part of the earth around them. If these are children of the soil, theirs is a bitter inheritance.

(top left page) Lovemore Kambudzi
Hatcliff Extension, 2000
102 x 170cm, Oil on canvas

(bottom left page) Lovemore Kambudzi
Parienyatwa Hospital, 2001
145 x 262cm, Oil on canvas

(top) Lovemore Kambudzi, *Food for Work*
2001, 99 x 151cm, Oil on canvas

(bottom) Lovemore Kambudzi, *Three Years no change*, 2001
84 x 154cm, Oil on canvas

This use of *tache* serves to suggest that where there is great urban poverty, nature is barely mediated by the social. This is most strikingly evident in *Hatchliffe Extension*. In the foreground of the painting two women wash clothes in a puddle and beside them is a meagre patch of four maize plants. These are the only gestures the painting makes towards normal social activity. Most of the canvas is composed of the roofs of shanties that stretch to the horizon, rectangles with uneven sides or fungus growths that at first sight are abstractions. This is not a simple representation of poverty although it is that as well. It is a satire because each of the flimsy, vaguely square roofs – which on closer attention are held in place by rocks – becomes a pathetic attempt to effect a stable shelter using the diagonals which are the obvious forms of Zimbabwean urban modernity. The ground between the crowded shacks is indicated by darker shading in the *taches* than those that form the roofs but the repetition of *tache* draws everything into a sordid unity. If urban nostalgia can turn rural Zimbabwean life into a lost but golden world and if rural poverty can make an ideal of the city, the shantytown of this painting affronts both ideals in its inhuman compromise.

The Government's Food for Work programme is the subject of a painting of that name. Until I saw this painting, it had not occurred to me the cynical irony behind the slogan. Food and work are both fundamental human rights. That they should be given an equivalence in that equation – referring to nothing outside themselves – suggests that we have lost sight of the basic duties the state owes the nation and that we owe to one another. The scene is of brickmaking. Daga is being mixed in the left foreground, sun-dried bricks are in rows on the right and in the middle distance a clay pit has been dug, a brick kiln constructed and ox-drawn scotch carts are waiting to be filled. The only equivalence in this painting is that the skin of the labouring men has identical tones to the earth they are working. A telephone line, its poles leaning from the vertical, alongside a road whose edges are almost lost in the surrounding desolation, hints of the existence of a remote world where technology lessens the burden of labour and where labour may have a purpose that is absent here.

Many of Kambudzi's paintings are direct comments on present problems of urban living. *Three Years No Change* for example refers to the fuel crisis that has cursed the country since Zimbabwe found itself unable to muster the foreign currency needed to pay its suppliers. At first sight, such a subject seems to belong to what, earlier on in this essay, I called the ephemeral. Kambudzi's treatment of a real source of urban hardship



shows how important art makes a more lasting comment out of a passing phase in our national life. The line of people that curves from the foreground across the painting is not obviously a queue for paraffin. Until I registered that two women in the foreground were carrying containers, I read it as a voting queue and the pillars of the filling station seemed to possess the authority of some or other public office. In fact, these pillars repeat on a slightly larger scale the pillars of the verandas of the various shops around the space where the queue has formed. They are all, in a sense, public offices that confront the people who, in turn, become a faceless crowd. It is irrelevant whether the people are waiting for paraffin or an identity document or to vote or to buy the basics of life. Commerce and government are in the end equally indifferent to their dignity both as a collective and as individuals.

The queue, in this painting as in *Parirenyatwa Hospital*, is one metonymy Kambudzi uses to signify urban life. Another is the security apparatus of the state. *Gondo Harishayi* – the downward swooping of a hawk – seemed at first glance to be centred on a mugging, as three men attack a third. In fact, the three attackers carry handcuffs and are police or possibly soldiers as they are wearing camouflage. A woman on the left of the painting lies on the ground screaming, an arm raised to deflect the blow of a club, and more clubs are raised above the heads of the people throughout the painting. Black boots with thick soles single out the agents of the law from those they are assaulting. The two principal figures are barefooted and their bare feet, disproportionately big, are turned to face the viewer. But the bare feet seem pathetically vulnerable against the boots of the

assailants. High-density roofs trace the horizon and these too appear very fragile against the aggression of the law.

In all these paintings, the faces of Kambudzi's figures are stylized to the point of caricature: shoulders are hunched as if anticipating a blow, eyes are mere slits, while mouths and noses are greatly enlarged. No one smiles. This can be seen in *Truth Shall Set You Free*, an ironic title since the bars of a prison cell form the foreground of the painting and perhaps the title implies that no truthful accusation was leveled at the prisoners. Against the bars are two manacled figures whose faces show the typical features Kambudzi uses. Some people with whom I have discussed the paintings have objected to these as mere caricature. Caricatures they certainly are but they grow directly out of the world that he depicts. This is not a world that produces beauty and laughter; poverty has ground his people into a homogeneity of shared deprivation and they are hunched and immobile in the face of an indifferent authority. The artist is not mocking the people behind these faces. Instead, the faces are appropriate to his bleak vision of people from whom individuality may have been withdrawn but in their similarity to one another, they compose a collective that is finally resilient. If satire is affirmation, Kambudzi's satire affirms the presence of a people who may be bullied and starved but who refuse simply to disappear. There are always people, and in that presence there is potential for both change and therefore hope. ✎

Lovemore Kambudzi, *Gondo Harishayi* 2001, 99 x 129cm, Oil on canvas

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

The meaning and place of art in the public realm is an intriguing subject, raising questions about the nature of sculpture and of civic society in Zimbabwe. Surprising therefore that such bland examples of public sculpture were so uncritically acclaimed in your article ('Beyond the gallery walls: Art in public', *Gallery 27*).

Despite the technical competence of Adam Madebe's ploughman and miners, neither work succeeds in embodying the effort or strength demanded in these backbreaking physical labours. Instead, both works idealise their subject matter, providing reassurance to the bureaucrats who inhabit the office towers behind them. The works are anodyne simplifications which suppress uncomfortable tensions or contradictions inherent in the subject matter – tensions and contradictions which if confronted by the artist, might have engaged the interest of passing pedestrians.

Similarly, Minnie's baked clay is devoid of any associations, troubling or otherwise – it embodies no more 'meaning' than the marble and granite facing which surrounds it, except perhaps as a reminder that in Zimbabwe, drought is never far away. Small wonder then, that a wall clock has been stuck to it – why not, indeed?

The function of Kaufman's sable fountain in Union Avenue was presumably to soothe the senses of the hot shoppers in downtown Salisbury, and the work could not be less contentious, until one remembers that it was erected during the course of a bloody liberation war. Like Madebe's workers and Minnie's clay, it employs an idealised naturalism which reduces its ability to convey meaning beyond vague and generalised assertions of 'elegance' and 'majesty'.

In stark contrast to these deeply conservative works, Philippe Berry's *Balancing Elephant* challenges assumptions of urban passers-by about public art. Its implied instability, the absurdity of its posture and its puny scale mock the arrogance and pomposity of the adjacent Reserve Bank tower and the grotesque Zimbabwe Bird squatting at its base. The work's combination of naturalism and surrealism, the tension between the academic respectability of cast bronze and the irreverent treatment of hallowed Zimbabwean heritage subjects – balancing rocks and elephants – results in a witty, multi-layered reflection on the role and value of public art in our city.

Best of all, it made me laugh when I saw it first, and I still smile whenever I pass by.

Anthony Wilson
Harare



(above) Adam Madebe, *Ploughman*

(below) Philippe Berry, *Balancing Elephant*



Dear Sir

May I make a few comments on the issues of public art, and art and architecture (*Gallery 27*)?

Given Harare's singular lack of monuments, historical or modern, contemporary art in public places will inevitably have an unusually high profile. This is then perhaps a good point to probe the reasons for its being where it is, and to ask whether it is necessarily a Good Thing.

Your editorial refers to the beautification of buildings and the desire to make artists' work more widely known: admirable sentiments that need to be closely examined. Beautification implies enhanced visibility and a more prominent identity (it works like a well-known logo); it proclaims the

existence of surplus resources and ultimately prestige. In England today virtually all art commissioned for public buildings acts as a kind of advertising; altruism is not an issue.

This is not a problem, beyond fostering some extraordinarily bad art; public sculpture is now a professional practice in its own right, taught in some art schools. So successfully has it been promoted that there is a surplus, dealt with by siting work for a limited fixed term – 20 years or so. So on the one hand there are specialised practitioners producing site-specific work not intended for exhibition in galleries; on the other, are equally highly trained community-based artists who work with school children, hospitals, prisons, disabled people and so on to make collaborative work for local contexts. It often looks a bit folksy but like the corporate work conveys strong messages – though about the people who make it, rather than the patrons.

Evidently the more closely art is integrated with architecture, both structurally and ideologically, the better it works. Adam Madebe's *Ploughman* identifies the building with agriculture (of a particularly low-tech, labour intensive kind) but the plinth is pure add-on which detracts from the effect. It's surely a period piece as much as Gillian Kaufmann's *Fountain*, an anachronistic demonstration that animals are no more value-free than romantic socialist labourers. To have sited an *animalier*-type pair of bronze sable in central Harare in the middle of the liberation war was to erect a metaphor for European cultural values, European perceptions of Africa as 'natural', innocent and helpless. I am amazed that it has survived.

Art in public places often grinds an axe; it is used to proclaim status, hierarchy and power, to manipulate people; it is almost never value-free, purely decorative or altruistic. This has nothing to do with artists; commissioning public work can be a complicated, lengthy process at the end of which the art is appropriated and put to use by the patron. Patrons aren't villains, though – for instance, the meaning of a piece like Kaufmann's *Fountain* may only become apparent after a long time.

We need to acknowledge art's sub-texts, though; if we refuse to we not only fail to do justice to artists but deserve to get lumbered with a lot of inept junk like the *Balancing Elephant*.

Margaret Garlake
Borrowdale and London

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